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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000656

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SUBJECT: KUWAITI FM ON IRAQ SFA, TERRORISM, BASHAR AL-ASSAD
VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. Summary: Kuwait FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed in a June 8 meeting with Ambassador raised concerns that the expiration of Chapter 7 authorities and the negotiation of new SFA/SOFA arrangements between Kuwait and the U.S. could affect Kuwaiti equities on borders, POWs, compensation, and other issues. He welcomed a meeting with S/I Satterfield to discuss these issues. Ambassador said while the USG will work with the GOK to address its concerns, it is also important that Kuwait discuss them directly with the GOI. A Kuwaiti ambassador in Baghdad would help. Ambassador noted the important message sent by the UAE FM visit to Baghdad last week. Dr. Mohammed said the GOK welcomes the visit of Assistant to the President Wainstein next week, and the prospect of enhanced CT cooperation, but would block attempts to secure UN designation for the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS). Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, visiting Kuwait last week, seemed "under pressure," and asked the Amir to use his "good offices" to mediate with the Saudis and Egyptians. Bashar cited a key Syrian role in brokering the Doha agreement as proof of his good intentions. The Amir said this was not enough, and pressed Bashar on recognition of the new Lebanese government and full diplomatic relations, and to end the media attacks from Syrian proxies on the Saudis and other Lebanese parties. Bashar agreed to end the media attacks, but was equivocal on recognition. Kuwaiti press sources reported June 8 that Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) representatives were in Damascus to discuss "joint investment cooperation" following Bashar's June 3 meeting with KIA's Managing Director in Kuwait. Dr. Mohammed expected the new Parliament to continue its contentious relationship with the GOI, but said if Parliament continues to be ineffective when it returns from recess in October, the Amir will make good on his implied threat to dissolve it again. End Summary

Iraq-US SFA/SOFA: What about Kuwait?

¶2. (S) Kuwaiti FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al Sabah convoked Ambassador on short notice June 8 with a request to discuss Iraq-related issues. Dr. Mohammed said the GOK was increasingly concerned with news reports and statements coming out of Baghdad with regard to the SFA/SOFA agreement. He said GOI statements "rejecting Chapter VII" and generally indicating delays in negotiating a new U.S.-Iraq bilateral relationship raise questions about how Kuwaiti equities will be treated under any new arrangements. In particular, Dr. Mohammed said border control and demarcation, Khor Abdullah waterway rights of passage, Kuwaiti POWs and missing property, and compensation questions were all "negotiated" under Chapter VII authority, and the GOK is unclear on how its expiration would alter existing arrangements for handling these issues.

¶3. (S) Ambassador cautioned Dr. Mohammed that reporting on the SFA/SOFA negotiations in the regional press was rarely

accurate, and that statements attributed to Iraqi politicians inevitably reflect posturing and point-scoring to some degree. That said, these are difficult issues, and our intent is to keep Kuwait and others in the region informed. Ambassador suggested as a first step that the FM (and PM) meet with S/I Satterfield (as he had offered during a recent visit) for an update on the discussions. She also stressed the importance of directly discussing these issues with the GOI (noting as an aside that a Kuwaiti Ambassador would be well placed to do this). Ambassador highlighted the recent visit of UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayed, and the important message this sent. Dr. Mohammed agreed, noting that it had been his idea for the Arab League FMs to hold their next meeting in Baghdad. He invited S/I Satterfield to Kuwait to meet with him later this week. Ambassador suggested sending a senior delegation from Kuwait to the Friends of Iraq Conference in Abu Dhabi June 17-19 would be another good step.

Welcome Enhanced CT Cooperation, But Not RIHS Designation

¶4. (S) Ambassador raised the upcoming visit of Assistant to the President for Homeland Security Ken Wainstein, who will be carrying a presidential message asking for strengthened cooperation on counterterrorism, and possibly bringing an invitation to PM Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Jaber Al Sabah to visit Washington for follow up discussions. Dr. Mohammed said the GOK welcomes both the visit and the message. He added it would be particularly good to get the PM to Washington, as he has not been there since becoming PM.

¶5. (S) Ambassador noted that RIHS designation was going

KUWAIT 00000656 002 OF 003

forward this week at the UN, and asked again that Kuwait at minimum not block the designation. Dr. Mohammed replied quickly: "we will likely block it." Calling RIHS a "partner" to the GOK, Dr. Mohammed also noted that members of RIHS form an "influential bloc" in the Parliament, and can only be confronted with great difficulty for the GOK. Implicitly acknowledging problems at RIHS, he added "we should look for a way forward on this without designation."

Bashar Visit: "Under Pressure," Looking for Kuwaiti Help

¶6. (S) Dr. Mohammed offered a readout of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's June 3 visit to Kuwait. He said it was very clear that Bashar is "under pressure." Bashar's "main theme" for the visit was that Syria had played a key role at a critical point in the negotiations that led to the Doha agreement: it would not have been reached otherwise. Now that Syria has demonstrated its desire to be constructive, Bashar asked that the Amir use his "good offices" with the Saudis and the Egyptians (but especially the Saudis) to repair the relationships.

¶7. (S) Dr. Mohammed said the Amir offered three main points in response. First, Bashar should open full diplomatic relations with the GOL. There should be an immediate statement from Bashar personally or the Foreign Minister committing the SARG to establishing relations as soon as the new government is announced. According to Dr. Mohammed, when Bashar began reciting his usual litany of excuses, the Amir said "you may have taken a major step with the Doha agreements, but don't spoil it now by refusing to do what is necessary." Second, the Amir said Bashar should visit the new Lebanese President in Beirut, or at least receive the PM of a new Lebanese government. Third, Syria needs to cut off the Lebanese media attacks launched by its allies and proxies on the Saudis and other Lebanese parties. Bashar agreed to call a "media cease-fire," but was equivocal on recognition of the new government. He would have to wait to see the composition of the cabinet, and ensure the "right environment," though he would certainly receive "a legitimate representative of the Lebanese people."

¶ 8. (S) While Dr. Mohammed implied the Amir had pushed hard on Bashar to go farther before Kuwait would assist him with the Saudis, the Kuwait News Agency on June 8 reported that the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) is holding talks in Syria to discuss "prospects for joint investment cooperation." Bashar met with KIA Managing Director Bader al-Saad and several prominent Kuwaiti businessmen, indicating that investment promotion was another significant aim of the June 3 visit.

¶ 9. (S) Ambassador asked Dr. Mohammed what he perceives Bashar's priorities to be: "regime survival, Lebanon, the Golan?" Dr. Mohammed implied that the first (regime survival) was obvious, though he laughingly noted "we don't talk about that in this region." As for Syria's priorities vis-a-vis Lebanon and the Golan, "we Arabs debate that ourselves." Dr. Mohammed said for all the speculation, there is an "aura of possibility" now that we have not seen for some time. He cited the Turkey-brokered negotiations with Israel, the deal between Israel and Hizballah over prisoners and remains, and "Hamas and Haniyeh talking to Abu Mazen, agreeing to pursue reconciliation."

New Parliament: Amir "Not Bluffing"

¶ 10. (S) Dr. Mohammed said the new Parliament was proceeding with business according to the usual Kuwaiti pattern: "no honeymoon." He said in early sessions the MPs jockey to position themselves on issues, grandstanding and looking for attention. Only later do they "relax a little." He expected the Parliament will produce heated debates until it recesses at the end of June, but the "real test" will be whether it can get substantive business done when it goes back into session in October. Dr. Mohammed said the Amir was very clear in his June 1 speech opening Parliament's first session. The constitution gives the Amir "the right to go back to the people (i.e., dissolve Parliament and call new elections), and he will use it." He added the Amir is "not bluffing."

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KUWAIT 00000656 003 OF 003

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